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## Undisciplinary studies with sign languages: considerations from post-graduation academic production in Espírito Santo, Brazil

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**Abstract:** The production of knowledge related to sign languages is not restricted to linguistic studies. In Brazil, the emergence of research that highlights these languages is closely related to special education. This article aims to discuss the constitution of studies involving sign languages. Not necessarily those that focus on these languages, but rather those that highlight them by addressing groups, contexts, phenomena, and situations associated with them. To this end, based on undisciplinary applied linguistics and deaf studies in education, it analyzes data generated in a bibliographic and scientometric research that mapped works defended in postgraduate programs in the state of Espírito Santo, Brazil. A total of 90 academic works, published between 2003 and 2024, were selected. The analyses show that, although the production of knowledge related to sign languages in the state of Espírito Santo has been largely developed in the field of education, the works that address issues related to sign languages are constituted by a web of knowledge originating from different discursive formations. It is argued that the production of knowledge related to sign languages is marked by an undisciplinary nature insofar as it blurs the boundaries between different areas to support the understanding of practices involved with these languages, whether in the deaf education, in translation and interpreting, or in other matters involving deaf or hearing people.

**Keywords:** sign languages; deaf studies; meta-research.

### Introduction

The confinement of knowledge to areas and rules constitutes a technical ingenuity because it aspires to the elimination of any contagion amid the dynamics of life, diverse, heterogeneous, and full of chance and contingencies. It fosters ties that prioritize stability over the uncertainties and mysteries that the mix of knowledge can build (Fabrício; Borba, 2023, p. 25).

Inspired by the argument presented in the epigraph, in this article we begin from the comprehension that there is an undisciplinary character in studies that address directly or indirectly aspects related to sign languages originated from communities formed by deaf people. This comprehension guides the reading that we propose throughout this text, and grounds our theoretical and analytical choices. To support it, we adopt an approach that came to be known as undisciplinary applied linguistics.



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Given this, we draw on Fabrício and Borba (2023) who problematize the cartesian segmentation of knowledge, based on the case of linguistics as a field conceived within the division between theory and practice. In this way, the authors provide insights to comprehend another perspective in ways of conducting research, as proposed in Moita Lopes's (1998; 2006) pioneer work. In his study, the author distances the interventionist perspective from the field, assuming that the aim of applied linguistics is to problematize social life with the intention of comprehending practices in which language has a crucial role (Moita Lopes, 2006).

Following this debate, and considering the remnants of what is understood as disciplinary, the emergence of a field of study focused on sign languages is observed, starting from the second half of the 20th century. The formalization of this field is usually attributed to William Stokoe's seminal work, developed in the 1960s. This linguist presented a pioneering description of the American Sign Language, based on presuppositions from modern linguistics (Stokoe, 1990). Since then, there has been exponential growth in linguistic studies about sign languages in different parts of the world.

In Brazil, the creation of a work group called Language and Deafness, in 1988, within the National Association of Postgraduate Studies and Research in Literature and Linguistics (*Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Letras e Linguística* [Anpoll]) represents a landmark in this process (Brito; Câmara, 2019). Such an initiative contributed to the growth and consolidation of the field in the country, which today brings together numerous investigations developed by researchers affiliated with different postgraduate programs. Despite the growth of this field of investigation, it is difficult to ignore the extensive production of knowledge related to sign languages that is not restricted to linguistic studies. This is a body of research whose emergence has a close relationship with special education and, more particularly, with deaf education.

Considering this scenario, we emphasize that this article does not address studies that analyse or describe a sign language, particularly from a strictly linguistic perspective. Our focus lies on investigations that produce knowledge about sign language by examining groups, contexts, phenomena or situations associated with it. To distinguish them, we do not refer to these productions as studies *about* sign languages but as studies *with* sign languages.

That said, our aim here is to discuss the constitution of studies involving sign languages. To this end, we developed a research of a bibliometric and scientometric nature. This investigation is based on the search for and selection of academic works defended within *stricto sensu* postgraduate programs at institutions located in the geographical scope of the state of Espírito Santo, in the southeastern region of Brazil.

The article is organized so that, after this brief introduction, we contextualize the disciplinary dispersion of studies with sign languages through a historicization of the process of objectifying these languages in the production of knowledge. Next, we characterize the theoretical perspective of undisciplinary applied linguistics and the methodological procedures of bibliographic research, conducted through the search for and selection of academic works produced in Espírito Santo. Subsequently, we develop a discussion based on an analysis proceeding from the metaresearch, underscoring features of academic production with sign languages in postgraduate programs within the same state. Finally, in the final remarks, made possible by this analysis, we argue that these works are characterized by an undisciplinary character as they blur the boundaries among different areas, supporting comprehension about practices surrounding these languages in deaf education.

## **2 The disciplinary dispersion of studies with sign languages**

If we had neither voice nor language, and wanted to show things to each other, would we not seek to do it as the mute, indicating with hands, head, and all body? (Plato, 1973, p. 170)

Although many times restricted to the beginning of deaf schooling in the 18th century or to the linguistic legitimacy acquired in 1960, the history of sign languages goes back further and dates back to classical antiquity. In “Cratylus”, the famous dialogue written by Plato (1973) in the 4th century BC, Socrates is questioned about the status of language. In this philosophic work considered the oldest treatise about language in Western culture, the philosopher speculates on etymological matters, as well as on the origin of language. By guiding Cratylus and Hermogenes through his questioning method, Socrates mentions the way in which the deaf (“mutes” in the Brazilian translation published in the 1970s) express themselves in order to address the iconicity in processes of signification. Despite the importance of the platonic text to the history of linguistic ideas, here we want to highlight the reference to forms of body-gesture communication of the deaf in a dialogue written in ancient Greece.

A more curious intellectual focus about the deaf and sign languages, however, emerged between the 17th and 18th century, along with the first modern attempts of educating deaf children in Europe. As observed by Davis (1995), this period is not only marked by the establishment of countless schools for the deaf in different European cities, but also by the first great wave of book publications on deafness. To the author, nevertheless, the philosophical and medical curiosity would only be epiphenomena of another condition that led deafness to receive cultural attention in the enlightenment era: the recognition that deaf people reason, feel, think and use language just like hearing people do.

Among the first publications in Europe, the close relationship established between deafness and language can be noted in titles such as *Oratio de surditate et mutitate* (1591); *L'arte de'cenni* (1616); *Reducción de las letras y arte de enseñar a hablar a los mudos* (1620); *Chirologia: Or the Natural Language of the Hand* (1644); *Ars Signorum* (1661); *De Loquela* (1653); *The Deaf and Dumb Man's Discourse* (1670); *Surdus Loquens* (1694); *Disseratio de loquela* (1700); *Institution des sourds-muets par la voie des signes méthodiques* (1776); *Praktische Unterweissung Taubstumme Personen Reden und Schreiben zu Lehren* (1777) and *Théorie des signes* (1782). These are texts written by educators, language scholars, philosophers, jurists, mathematicians, doctors and musicians, which reflects the undisciplinary nature of the topic shared among them.

In the 19th century, through schooling, there was an expansion of opportunities for deaf people to meet and gather without necessarily the existence of a familiar correlation among them. In this context, sign language came to be “[...] disseminated through the deaf schools, and the teachers in these schools were themselves deaf. So an educational system evolved that consolidated the deaf into a community” (Davis, 1995, p. 82). From this context, it is possible to identify the emergence of a collective deaf awareness that, according to Benvenuto e Seguillon (2016), was formed from a political movement in which deaf people began to manifest their existence as citizens, demanding conditions of equality and sign language preservation. To the authors, this movement is marked by the creation of the first deaf association and the implementation of deaf-mute banquets, a strategy to unify the community and seek alliances with important political figures of the time. Besides, the “[...] claim to the right

to sign language allowed the deaf to be able to intervene in the political sphere and have an active voice in public spaces [...]” (Benvenuto; Seguillon, 2016, p. 76).

This political and social movement by deaf people established a solid basis that legitimates the argument for the cultural unity of the deaf when sign language became a study object of modern linguistics in the 20th century, as mentioned in the introduction of this article. Before that, however, Carvalho (2023) points out that the work of a French deaf scholar, Pierre Desloges, at the end of the 18th century, already described sign language in grammatical terms. According to the author, being sustained by a philologic perspective, which relied in the comparative method, the description of Desloges was “more morphological and syntactic in character, which, at the time, was treated as Grammar” (Carvalho, 2023, p. 125). Back to the 20th century, we cannot fail to mention the pioneer work of the Dutch Bernard Tervoort, in 1953. In his dissertation, he proposed comprehending gestural communication established among deaf children as an esoteric communication system, without labeling it as sign language, which would be done by Stokoe (1960), a few years later, when describing three minimum constituents of a sign.

From this movement in the linguistic studies field, a series of other works were produced in order to expand the description of sign languages, with a focus on their phonetic, morphological and syntactic aspects. The emphasis of these studies was to present linguistic evidence that placed sign languages within the same scope as other natural languages, a category that had until then been restricted to languages in the vocal-auditory modality. In this context, the 1970s served as a stage for the emergence of academic works and courses that, according to Bauman and Murray (2016), sought to reformulate the comprehension about deaf individuals, defining them more by their practices and cultural affiliation than by their disability. This organization, prompted by linguistic studies regarding sign languages, mobilized the recognition of what came to be called deaf studies:

[...] an interdisciplinary field, incorporating content, critiques, and methodologies from anthropology, cultural studies, linguistics, history, philosophy, literature, art, film, media studies, architecture, psychology, human geography, policy, and human rights studies among others [...] (Bauman; Murray, 2016, p. 272).

In connection with this, sign language linguistics and deaf studies significantly impacted the contemporary thought concerning deaf education, so that it is possible to

observe a shift in emphasis toward linguistic pedagogical practices with deaf children. As already documented by different authors from the field<sup>1</sup>, up to that point, the methodological focus in educational work with the deaf was to develop their skills in spoken-auditory languages, whether through writing or through phonatory and oro-facial reading techniques. Although sign languages, since the 18th century, were at times closer and at times more distant from these practices, the purpose of deaf education emphasized a model centered on hearing and vocality. However, in the end of the 20th century, sign languages came to be understood not only as a pedagogical tool for access to spoken language and its writing, but also as an instruction language and as the first language of deaf children, even for those born in hearing families and homes.

Thus, ideas such as adopting the perspective of a bilingual education began to be discussed among educators working in deaf education. From this perspective, we observe a shift in the emphasis of research, which had been focusing on linguistic aspects of sign languages as, in the special education field, the production of studies on deafness associated with language matters increased. According to Barberena (2013), the work group Special Education, from National Association of Post-graduation and Research in Education (*Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Educação* [ANPEd]), created in 1991, enabled the spread of discussions related to the linguistic development of deaf children during their schooling. The author explains that works from the 1990s in this work group addressed: “[...] reading and writing instruction, [...] the closer engagement of total communication and bilingualism in deaf education, and Libras as a contributing artifact not only of a language but of a cultural group” (Barberena, 2013, p. 75).

In Brazil, we observe a popularization of topics surrounding deaf education and sign languages beyond linguistics and special education, as knowledge related to Brazilian sign language (Libras) became established as a mandatory course in higher education for teacher training in the 21st century. This implies a democratization of knowledge about sign languages and deaf education, which came to be shared among undergraduate students in teacher education programs in different areas such as

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<sup>1</sup> For an updated understanding of the history of oralist education for deaf people, we recommend the reading of works produced by the Interinstitutional Research Group on Libras and Deaf Education (*Grupo Interinstitucional de Pesquisa em Libras e Educação de Surdos* [Giples]), with a focus on the article written by Rodrigues, Vieira-Machado, and Vieira (2021).

visual arts, biological sciences, social sciences, physical education, philosophy, physics, geography, history, mathematics, music, chemistry, among others.

The spread across disciplines in discussions regarding sign languages and deaf education has been strengthened by the inclusive education policy, that decentralized educational practices for the deaf. Hence, the responsibility for deaf education was no longer exclusive to special education. In the next section, we adopted the perspective of undisciplinary applied linguistics to think about the production of knowledge marked by interdisciplinarity, and we characterize the methodological procedures of the research that supports the discussion presented here.

### **3 An undisciplinary metaresearch with sign languages**

As already mentioned, this article derives from an investigation inspired by an epistemological point of view known as undisciplinary applied linguistics. Applied linguistics, in this text, operates much less as an area or discipline, and much more as, in Moita Lopes's words (2006, p. 15), a way of "[...] creating intelligibility about social problems in which language has a central role". This implies perceiving that what has conventionally been called applied linguistics, according to Rajagopalan (2023, p. 193), "[...] is neither linguistics, nor applied, and [...] nor can it be considered an academic discipline in the full sense of this term". From this comprehension, we position ourselves within the undisciplinary applied linguistics approach, considering it an anti-discipline or, as proposed by Pennycook (2023), an epistemic assemblage.

By saying this, we want to emphasize we are very distant from moving toward the application of concepts or terms drawn from linguistics—a classic and, even, dated perspective of what applied linguistics would be. However, we move closer to a dialogue with theoretical contributions and discussions that permeate social sciences and the humanities. It is a dialogue with the current world and the questioning of presuppositions taken for granted in a very positivist and rigid way of producing knowledge.

Considering our trajectory and experience in deaf education, as well as in sign language translation and interpretation, we have observed the production, circulation and consumption of knowledge in these fields, which mobilize different theoretical perspectives and distinct methodological approaches while also establishing

connections among different fields of study. This knowledge is expressed in the form of works resulting from research projects from a wide range of disciplines creating a contemporary mosaic about the knowledge surrounding sign languages but not necessarily focused on them. We refer to this multidimensional assemblage as undisciplinary studies with sign languages.

Once the theoretical perspective that guides the development of the research presented here was explained, we proceed to the description of methodological presuppositions that guided our investigative work. Thus, in order to better comprehend how these undisciplinary studies with sign languages have developed and constituted as a dispositive in which comprehensions about sign languages are situated, we conducted a metaresearch, it is, an investigation about research. As a type of research of bibliographical nature, the metaresearch, according to Paiva (2019, p. 65), “[...] may analyse themes, theories, research methods or a combination of these and other aspects”.

In the study presented in this article, we combine methodological aspects from bibliographic research and scientometric research. We consider that these two types of research share similarities with regard to the empiric nature and the form of organization of the material analysed. In this way, we understand that both the bibliographic method and scientometry can be considered as belonging to the scope of the same methodological line, the metaresearch.

Regarding the bibliographic research procedures, we start from the classic definition of this type of investigation. In this perspective, the analysis was performed about a materiality that had already been acknowledged as scientific (Lakatos; Marconi, 2017). This implied the establishment of a selection criteria that restricts the *corpus* to academic works produced in the sphere of *stricto sensu* postgraduate programs, it is, master’s theses and PhD dissertations.

As the main database and material selection, we made use of the theses and dissertations catalogue<sup>2</sup>, from a Brazilian government foundation, Coordination of Superior Level Staff Improvement (*Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* [Capes]). Nonetheless, a geographical scope had to be established so we could manage the mapping of the research production, which is much larger when

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<sup>2</sup> Available at: <https://catalogodeteses.capes.gov.br/catalogo-teses/>.

considering the extension of institutions that have produced research related to sign languages throughout Brazil. For this reason, we established that the search would consider productions of the state of Espírito Santo, situated in the southeastern part of the country. In addition to Capes's catalogue, we relied on institutional repositories from three institutions in Espírito Santo that contain academic works with characteristics included in selection criteria for the material: *Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo* (Ufes), *Instituto Federal do Espírito Santo* (Ifes) and *Centro Universitário Vale do Cricaré* (UNIVC).

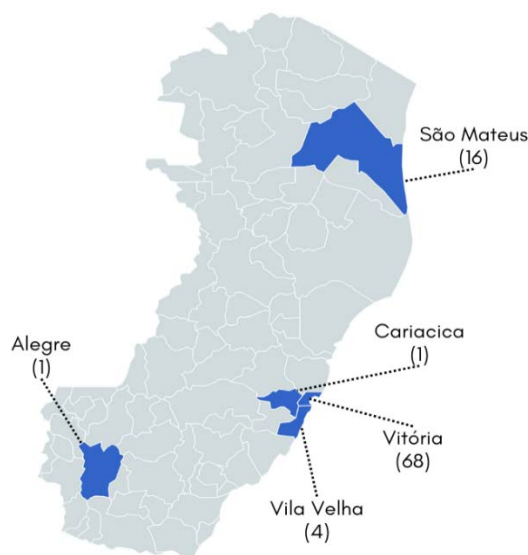
Regarding the scientometrics approach, we are inspired by the material analysis in this field, which, according to Hayashi (2013), emerged as a result of the convergence of sociology of science, social studies of science, and information science since the 1960s. Thus, scientometrics is comprehended through the study of scientific activity, understood as a social phenomenon, based on mathematical indicators and models (Hayashi, 2013). Building on this approach, which has interdisciplinary features that shaped its methodological constitution, we focused efforts in the quantitative recognition of the selected material characteristics, identifying its prominence in different areas and in institutions, as well as the thematic trends in research, as we present in the following section.

#### **4 Studies with sign languages in the context of Espírito Santo**

In order to comprehend characteristics of the production of knowledge related to sign languages in the geographical scope of Espírito Santo, we selected 90 academic works defended from 2003 to 2024. These studies were produced in postgraduate programs in higher education institutions located in this state. By taking an analytical gaze at the material, we identified an emerging field that is establishing itself while moving away from traditional disciplinary focuses.

From the geographical perspective, the distribution and number of selected academic works can be observed in the map of the state of Espírito Santo, shown in Figure 1. In this figure, we highlighted five municipalities that host the development of research that form the body of work mapped for this article. The municipalities are the capital Vitória; two municipalities that integrate the metropolitan area, Cariacica and Vila Velha; the municipality of Alegre, in the southern region of the state; and São Mateus, in the northern region of Espírito Santo.

Figure 1 – Distribution and number of works per municipality



Source: The authors (2025)

From this map, we argue that the central position of the capital in the production of knowledge regarding sign languages, representing 68 works (75,56%), demonstrates the strength of already established institutional networks, given that Vitória is home to two *campi* of Ufes. The institution is the only federal university located in Espírito Santo and it offers 66 postgraduate programs in a wide range of areas, highlighting the central role of the capital as a scientific research center. Although institutions such as Ifes have *campi* in different municipalities of the state, the central position of Vitória may reflect not only the institutional structure of Ufes but also its most established research network. This data, however, also points to a necessity of territorial and epistemological expansion of a field that has conditions to be more explored in other spaces in which the production of knowledge has been produced in Espírito Santo.

However, the 16 works in São Mateus, representing 17,78% of the *corpus*, indicates a process of decentralization of the academic production. This process might be related not only to the expansion of Ufes into non-metropolitan areas, which maintains a campus in this municipality. It also suggests the emergence of groups interested in the sign language topic in new academic regions, according to the records of 13 works produced at UNIVC, a private institution, as presented in Figure 2:

Figure 2 – Number of works per institution



Source: The authors (2025)

We understand that the prominent role of 67 works developed at Ufes establishes this institution in a position of academic hegemony in the production of knowledge about sign languages in the state. Ifes, with 10 works, and UNIVC, with 13, also appear in the mapping with relevant participations. Still, these data make it possible to infer a low institutional diversity in the production of undisciplinary studies with sign languages at the postgraduate level in Espírito Santo.

The central position of Ufes can indicate, on the one hand, the strength of research groups committed with themes related to sign languages. On the other hand, this centrality may also demonstrate institutional limits concerning epistemic plurality. In this sense, this spatial and institutional distribution of works can be read as an indication of the ways knowledge circulates in specific geopolitical contexts, allowing for the comprehension of the territorialities of undisciplinary studies with sign languages as a situated and, in part, peripheral production.

When we consider the distribution of these works across postgraduate programs, areas of Education, with 39 academic works, and Linguistics, with 14, stand out as the main fields of research production that highlight topics involving sign languages. Other programs, associated with the teaching area, are also included, which reflects the dialogue of the sign language topic with fields that raise questions about teacher education, teaching, and educational practices in diverse contexts. In total, 13 postgraduation programs were identified in the mapped production, which are presented in Table 1, as follows:

Table 1 - Number of works per postgraduate program

Postgraduate program	Institution	Works
Education	Ufes	39
Linguistics	Ufes	14
Science, Technology and Education	UNIVC	8
Sciences and Mathematics Education	Ifes	6
Social Management, Education and Regional Development	UNIVC	5
Language and Literature	Ufes	5
Professional and Technological Education	Ifes	3
Teaching in Basic Education	Ufes	3
Informatics	Ufes	2
Psychology	Ufes	2
Electrical Engineering	Ufes	1
Teaching, Basic Education and Teacher Education	Ufes	1
Physics Teaching	Ifes	1

Source: The authors (2025)

With the strong presence of the Postgraduate Program in Education at Ufes in this list, we reinforce the historical role the educational field has as a privileged locus in discussions about sign languages through deaf education, which, as we argue, has been constituted primarily as language education throughout its history (Witchs; Zilio; Teixeira, 2022). Nevertheless, the distribution of works across programs situated in other areas such as Linguistics, Psychology, Informatics and Engineering, allow us to observe how studies with sign language are not restricted to a single disciplinary box. They express a transversal and undisciplinary nature in the production of knowledge. This indicates an epistemological mobility in studies with sign languages, which, contrary to what we could imagine, are not initially focused in the linguistics studies field.

These works are produced in the master's and PhD level, with 53 of them conducted in academic master's degree courses; 23, in professional master's degree courses; and 14, in academic PhD courses. The presence of professional master's degree courses, in this production, underscores the recognition of the value of practices and knowledge of basic education and professional work, while the Phd, although fewer in number, evidences a maturity in the consolidation of research related to sign languages. The significant body of research at master's level might be seen as a possibility of flourishing, in which investigations still anchor in concrete pedagogical and training practices but with an increasing openness to more complex theoretical elaborations, which has directly reflected in the emergence of PhD research.

Among the selected material, we identified 12 authors that continued their education in PhD courses in Espírito Santo. These authors developed research related to interdisciplinary studies with sign languages in the master's and PhD level. For the most part, the academic path occurred in the same postgraduate program, as registered in Table 2.

Table 2 – Authors who conducted theses and dissertations in Espírito Santo

Master's theses	PhD dissertations
ANDRADE, A. N. <b>Vozes do silêncio:</b> juízos morais de jovens e adultos surdos sobre situações de humilhação. 2006. 176 f. Thesis (Master's in Psychology) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Psicologia, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, 2006.	ANDRADE, A. N. <b>Ecoss do silêncio:</b> juízos de surdos no âmbito da formação superior sobre projetos de vida e humilhação nas perspectivas moral e ética. 2012. 293 f. Dissertation (PhD in Psychology) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Psicologia, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, 2012.
BREGONCI, A. M. <b>Estudantes surdos no Proeja:</b> o que nos contam as narrativas. 2012. 179 f. Thesis (Master's in Education) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, 2012.	BREGONCI, A. M. <b>Cartografando a educação de surdos, deficientes auditivos e surdocegos na região do Caparaó Capixaba/ES.</b> 2017. 261 f. Dissertation (PhD in Education) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, 2017.
CARVALHO, D. J. <b>Não basta ser surdo para ser professor:</b> as práticas que constituem o ser professor surdo no espaço da inclusão. 2016. 149 f. Thesis (Master's in Education) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, 2016.	CARVALHO, D. J. <b>A instrução na educação de surdos produzida na modernidade:</b> a tríplice condução de surdos-professores. 2023. 243 f. Dissertation (PhD in Linguistics) - Programa de Pós-Graduação em Linguística, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, 2023.
COSTA, L. M. <b>Traduções e marcas culturais dos surdos capixabas:</b> os discursos (des)construídos quando a resistência conta a história. 2007. 186 f. Thesis (Master's in Education) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, 2007.	VIEIRA-MACHADO, L. M. C. <b>(Per)Cursos na formação de professores surdos capixabas:</b> constituição da educação bilíngue no estado do Espírito Santo. 2012. 219 f. Dissertation (PhD in Education) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, 2012.
COSTA JÚNIOR, E. R. <b>A modelação de uma política cooperativa na formação de estudantes surdos no Ensino Superior.</b> 2015. 149 f. Thesis (Master's in Education) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, 2015.	COSTA JÚNIOR, E. R. <b>Processos de formalização-informalização na formação de TILS brasileiros e mexicanos:</b> uma abordagem sociológica figuracional. 2021. 149 f. Dissertation (PhD in Education) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, 2021.
DOMINGOS, P. <b>A língua brasileira de sinais em contexto acadêmico:</b> diálogos a partir do Círculo de Bakhtin. 2016. 94 f. Thesis (Master's in Linguistics) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Linguística, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, 2016.	DOMINGOS, P. <b>Uma vida translinguageira como possibilidade de:</b> problematizando lugares e inventando transfluxos. 2021. 274 f. Dissertation (PhD in Linguistics) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Linguística, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, 2021.
OLMO, K. G. B. <b>Educação bilíngue em diário:</b> políticas e práticas constituídas na educação dos surdos no município de Linhares no estado do Espírito Santo. 2018. 138 f. Thesis (Master's in Education) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em	OLMO, K. G. B. <b>Educação de surdos:</b> Bruxelas como circuito de formação pedagógica. 2024. Dissertation (PhD in Education) - Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, 2024.

Educação, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, 2018.	
RABELO, D. B. <b>O bebê surdo na educação infantil: um olhar sobre inclusão e práticas pedagógicas.</b> 2014. 173 f. Thesis (Master's in Education) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, 2014.	RABELO, D. B. <b>A educação infantil para crianças surdas em municípios da região metropolitana de Vitória.</b> 2018. 230 f. Dissertation (PhD in Education) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, 2018.
RODRIGUES, J. R. <b>As seções de surdos e de ouvintes no Congresso de Paris (1900): problematizações sobre o pastorado e a biopolítica na educação de surdos.</b> 2018. 202 f. Thesis (Master's in Education) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, 2018.	RODRIGUES, J. R. <b>Educar para a vida e não para a escola: a educação desejada nos congressos internacionais de surdos entre 1889 e 1900.</b> 2023. 320 f. Dissertation (PhD in Education) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, 2023.
SILVA-FERREIRA, A. B. <b>A prática da retextualização na aula bilíngue Libras-português.</b> 2010. 178 f. Thesis (Master's in Linguistics) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Linguística, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, 2010.	SILVA, A. B. <b>Literatura em Libras e educação literária de surdos: um estudo da coleção "Educação de Surdos" e de vídeos literários em Libras compartilhados na Internet.</b> 2015. 196 f. Dissertation (PhD in Literature) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, 2015.
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Source: The authors (2025)

In the body of academic work analysed, we also highlight the presence of five deaf authors, two of whom are already doctors, such as Eliane Telles de Bruim Vieira, considered the first deaf doctor in Espírito Santo, and Daniel Junqueira Carvalho, who is a permanent professor at Ufes. Besides, Ademar Miller Junior, author of one of the theses, also holds the position of permanent professor at the same institution, however, his PhD was undertaken in an institution outside the state. We consider the presence of deaf authors in the mapped works—including two doctors and two permanent professors of the federal university—not only relevant quantitative data but a qualitative milestone in the constitution of studies with sign languages in Espírito Santo. When investigating narratives of deaf people in postgraduate, which are registered in their theses and dissertations produced in Brazilian postgraduate programs, Pokorski

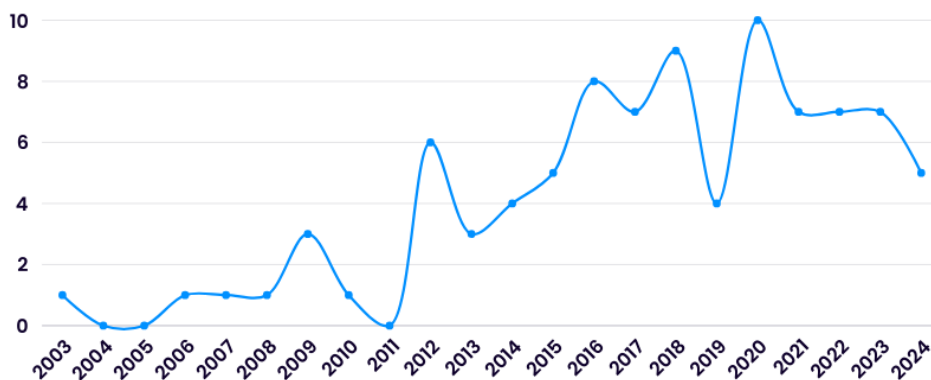
(2020) underscores that these works serve as an important space for the circulation of meanings about the deaf, deaf education, sign languages and other topics. The author emphasizes features of undisciplinarity when she claims these works not only centered subjects who had little room to act as protagonists of their own narratives, but also incorporated “[...] knowledge of different areas related to sign language and the linguistic communities that use this language [...]” (Pokorski, 2020, p. 265).

The recognition of Eliane Vieira as the first deaf doctor in Espírito Santo assumes, in this context, a symbolic and political value that goes beyond the individual authorship. Her academic existence, as well as that of other deaf doctors, indicates, in the production of knowledge, the presence of a deaf epistemology —or, in terms of undisciplinary applied linguistics, of an epistemic body that carries its own features, experiences and regimes of truth. This shift is even more meaningful when we observe some of these deaf authors occupy positions as permanent professors at a public university, unsettling not only the “who researches” but also the “how” and “for what” they research. Besides repositioning deaf subjects in the academic sphere, this data reveals the emergence of educational practices that, even still in their early stages, enabled deaf people to reach the PhD level and entry into the university faculty.

This movement defies traditional mechanisms of normalization present in deaf history and opens space to pedagogical and political practices that recognize sign language as a language of scientific production— and not only an accessibility language. From the point of view of undisciplinarity, deaf presence in postgraduate programs unsettles notions of which individuals have the right of scientific authorship. These deaf authors/researchers not only discuss deafness and sign language but also write from it, reinscribing language, body and experience as legitimate spaces of enunciation. In their own way, they constitute rupture agents —of theoretical, methodological and institutional spheres— that contribute to reshaping academic know-how.

Regarding the publication dates, we observe a significant increase beginning in 2012. The stabilization of academic works produced in the following years, however, are consistent with important legal and academic landmarks. In this way, in Graphic 1, we present the number of works defended per year, which allow us to visualize some patterns.

Graphic 1 – Number of works per year



Source: The authors (2025)

From a temporal perspective, we highlight, as examples of facts that influence the production, the consolidation of undergraduate degrees in Libras beginning in 2006, the strengthening of the professional category of translators and interpreters of the Libras-portuguese language pair, and the broadening of the discussion about accessibility in higher education. This trajectory growth happens, however, through a path constituted for few productions, between 2003 and 2010, which can be read as resistant efforts in a still incipient scenario for the development of research surrounding themes associated with sign languages in the first decade of the 21st century. This provides evidence of the recent introduction of sign languages in the academic sphere of Espírito Santo.

The categorical organization of themes in the selected theses and dissertations enabled us to identify a significant group of investigative focuses surrounding sign languages, such as language, social practice and political object. Hence, we identified at least eight thematic groups, from which additional subgroups can be derived, demonstrating a plural and contested field. In Table 3, we present these groups and subgroups, as well as the number of works that develop them.

Table 3 – Thematic groups and subgroups

Thematic groups	Thematic subgroups	Works
Deaf education	early childhood education, high school, adult education, high education; bilingual practices; teacher education; pedagogical technologies	22
Translation and interpretation of sign languages	translators and interpreters training and practice, educational interpreting; translation policies and management; cultural practices and resistance	14

Science, math and Portuguese teaching	bilingual teaching of science and mathematics; teaching of Portuguese as a second language for the deaf; text reading and production	13
Language, subjectivity and deaf experience	deaf identities and narratives; deaf-deaf meetings; body and language; translanguaging; deaf writing	11
Family, community and social management	relationship between parents and school; interpreter's role as social mediator; institutional inclusive policy	9
Technology and accessibility	Libras teaching platforms; accessible digital materials; augmentative communication	8
Deaf literature and culture	literature in Libras; humor and performance; media and culture; transculturality	7
Deaf education history	historical conferences; local archives and trajectories; historical policy	6

Source: The authors (2025)

Issues such as science and mathematics teaching for the deaf, teacher education, translators and interpreters training, deaf literature, subjectivation processes and deaf education history emerge as strong investigative lines in the analysed production. This body of work highlights a theoretical-methodological move that not only discusses sign languages but also incorporates them as an analytical category that goes through bodies, knowledge, relationships and policies. It is in this direction that deaf studies offer a strong key to comprehend attributed meanings to sign languages not as an external study object but as a symbol of belonging and epistemic insurgence.

It is important to underscore that the most prolific area is deaf education. This area is subdivided in different scholar steps and pedagogical practices, with an emphasis on bilingual education and teacher education. This prevalence makes evident the school's historical and political role as a place of struggle for linguistic and cultural recognition, while also reflecting a production mainly linked to postgraduate programs from the areas of Education and Teaching.

Sign language translation and interpretation constitutes another substantial area, articulating research about professional training, practice in educational contexts and institutional accessibility policy. In this regard, we highlight the existence of the undergraduate degree in Libras at Ufes, which stands as the only bachelor's degree in translation and interpretation offered by a public institution in Espírito Santo since the beginning of the first class in 2014 (Vieira-Machado, L. L.; Vieira-Machado, L. M. C., 2024). This means understanding how different themes involving translation and interpretation in sign languages have been studied and disseminated through higher

education of translators and interpreters in the state, who also pursue further academic training in master's and doctoral programs.

Concerning the academic works on language, subjectivity and deaf experience, it is possible to say they propose a fundamental theoretical shift as they prioritize perceptions of deaf people and their own ways of enunciation. With regard to this body of work, we highlight discussions related to translanguaging practices, sign language writing systems and subjectivation processes that operate the constitution of deaf subjects from the experience of deafness. Similarly, productions about deaf literature (or literature in sign languages) and deaf cultures emerge as a domain of artistic and political visibility, integrating poetical productions, performances and transcultural reinventions.

In relation to the teaching of specific knowledge, particularly in the area of nature sciences, mathematics and Portuguese language, it is possible to observe the concentration of discussions concerning accessible and bilingual educational methods. These studies, in its majority, focus the debate on linguistic aspects and in the lexical formulation and analysis specialized in sign languages. Meanwhile, the body of work on technology and accessibility, deaf history education, and family and social management, demonstrate the intersectional, undisciplined and amplified character of research with sign languages.

The categorization of these themes, far from being merely classificatory, reveal the constitution of a field in flux. This field defies disciplinary boundaries, reinscribes deaf epistemologies and produces knowledge from multiple enunciation territories. The material analysed in this article, allows thinking about the constitution of a field of studies regarding sign languages in Espírito Santo with some central characteristics. This field is centered, but it is in expansion and, although still at the core of a federal university, it can be considered interinstitutional. It presents an epistemological nature, even though predominantly grounded in discussions originating from the educational and linguistic areas. Despite being historically recent, we perceive it establishes itself as a field in process of consolidation. Besides, it is thematically diverse, which provides it a critical and transforming potential. In sequence, we present our final remarks with regard to the discussion presented in this article.

## 5 Final remarks

In this article, we take the constitution of undisciplinary studies with sign languages as the object of analysis, based on the academic production in postgraduate programs located in the state of Espírito Santo, in Brazil. From the perspective of undisciplined applied linguistics and deaf studies in education, we developed a discussion about this body of work. In this process, we have unsettled the ways in which knowledge about sign languages has been produced, disseminated and legitimized, especially when it is not limited to strictly linguistic studies, but opens up to dialogues with social, scholarly, cultural and political practices regarding the deafness experience.

The analysis of the 90 academic works, comprehended as master's theses and PhD dissertations, has enabled us to perceive central characteristics in this production. Although characterized by institutional and geographical centralities, such as the hegemony of the only federal university in the state and the focus of productions in the capital, this production also shows a field in flux. It is a field in which its boundaries escape the disciplinary rigidity and it constitutes itself by a multiplicity of voices, themes and theoretical perspectives, in which language does not operate as a mere object of study, but as a constitutive instance of practices and ways of living.

We can argue that the undisciplined character that crosses these studies manifests both in the diversity of programs and fields of knowledge in which they were produced, and in the themes they address. The mapping presented here has brought to light a broad thematic spectrum that goes from deaf education in its multiple steps to deaf literature, going through translators and interpreters training, educational technologies, translanguaging practices, deaf subjectivities and inclusion policy. This variety reaffirms that sign languages, far from being only communicative tools, are also dispositives of belonging, resistance and production of meaning about the world.

Still, we reinforce that the presence of deaf authors among the selected works indicates a relevant epistemic inflection. This concerns the emergence of deaf individuals as researchers and leading figures of their own narratives in the context of Espírito Santo. This process redefines what is understood as scientific production and reshapes enunciation modes that, historically, were marginalized or assigned to hearing people.

From the discussion presented here, we argue that the group of analysed productions allows bringing visibility to the constitution of undisciplined studies with sign languages in Espírito Santo. Although marked by institutional and geographical centralities, these studies form a field in expansion, which is plural and crossed by epistemic insurgent practices. In consonance with an applied linguistics of critical and interdisciplinary perspective, as well as with deaf studies, this production defies the disciplinary limits and affirms other manners of being, thinking and researching with sign languages.

It is important to highlight that we recognize that this article presents limits that might be overcome by other research. The choice of only one state of the federation as the study's geographical scope, even if justified by the aim of understanding the constitution within an expanding field, imposes restrictions to the generalizability of the discussion. Beyond that, when we focus exclusively on academic works produced in *stricto sensu* postgraduate programs, we do not consider other modes of academic production —such as published articles in periodics, undergraduate thesis and Libras productions— that are also part of the ecosystem of knowledge surrounding sign languages. Thus, we suggest the amplification of this metaresearch to other regional and institutional contexts, as well as the inclusion of materialities that escape the most traditional formats of the academic and scientific production, but that can offer intelligibility about discursive, educational and translational practices engaged with the deaf living ways in their multiple dimensions.

Lastly, we establish that interdisciplinary studies with sign languages, as discussed in this article, constitute a fertile arena for reflection about other epistemologies. These studies also enable thinking of research practices committed to the complexity of social life and to knowledge policy that recognize language in its ethical, aesthetic and political power. In contexts marked by attempts of reconducting knowledge to normative frames, assuming undisciplinarity as a methodological and political principle constitutes, equally, a gesture of academic insurgence.

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